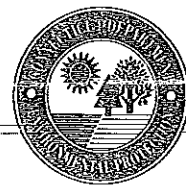


STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



Public Hearing – January 31, 2011  
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Amey W. Marrella  
Department of Environment Protection

**Raised Senate Bill No. 829 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN OPEN SPACE REGISTRY**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised Senate Bill No. 829 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN OPEN SPACE REGISTRY. The Department of Environmental Protection (Department) offers the following testimony.

**Open Space and Farmland Preservation Registry**

The raised bill requires the Commissioners of the Departments of Environmental Protection and Agriculture to develop a central open space and farmland preservation registry, in collaboration with the chief elected official of each municipality.

As background, both the Department and the Department of Agriculture currently catalog open space and preserved farmland by means of electronic mapping software. The Department's efforts to create a statewide baseline of currently protected open space is titled the Protected Open Space Mapping (POSM) project and is being accomplished with the cooperation of all 169 municipalities in Connecticut. The goal of this project is in concert with the goal of Senate Bill No. 829, as POSM includes complete location, boundary, and attribute data for all parcels in the state that meet a standard definition of protected open space, regardless of ownership.

At present, the Department has collected data from 148 or 88% of all municipalities and data from 78 of those towns is currently available for public use on-line. The pace of effort towards completion of the project is dependent on financial resources available. Progress on the project is labor intensive (requiring multiple visits to every town hall in Connecticut), and is currently being accomplished with the use of durational employees with very specific skill sets.

The Department, in cooperation with the University of Connecticut's Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR), makes protected open space data available in two on-line formats, free of charge. One format is designed for the professional users in the land use planning community, and the other is available through Connecticut Environmental Conditions Online (CT ECO), a new interactive internet feature that is intended for use by the general public. Both formats can be accessed via <http://cteco.uconn.edu/>.

The Department remains committed to finalizing this baseline catalog of protected open space through the POSM program. However, the Department would like to work with the

~~Environment Committee and proponents of this bill to determine the most effective and cost-efficient means of ensuring that municipalities, land trusts and other non-profits inform the keeper of the registry about newly protected lands.~~

### **Wildlife Conservation and Open Space Preservation**

The raised bill requires that the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection analyze whether the protected lands are effective in protecting all species listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern, as detailed in Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. In addition, the bill requires that the Commissioner of Environmental Protection identify land that needs to be acquired in order to protect habitats of greatest conservation need, as identified in the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, and establish priorities for acquisition of such lands.

The Department sets forth its priorities for open space preservation in the Department's Green Plan ([http://www.ct.gov/dep/lib/dep/open\\_space/green\\_plan.PDF](http://www.ct.gov/dep/lib/dep/open_space/green_plan.PDF)). The Green Plan relies on many other plans and strategies in prioritizing open space preservation, such as the Connecticut Statewide Forestry Resource Plan, the Connecticut Climate Change Action Plan, and the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, in addition to Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The Department will be working over the next year to prepare an update of this five year plan in 2012.

Currently, the Department has sufficient information to identify and prioritize habitat types that need be protected to conserve species of greatest conservation need, but we do not have a complete picture of every location of these specific habitats. Information in the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy and our recently drafted Connecticut Climate Preparedness Plan can be used to set priorities for habitat types of greatest conservation need. However, in the absence of a statewide inventory of all habitat types, habitat conservation will need to proceed based on the best available information and as opportunities for acquisition arise.

The Department would like to work with the Committee, proponents of this bill and the Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board in setting a framework for the upcoming revision to the Green Plan, and discussing how the Department will analyze how preserved lands serve to meet all of the priorities of the Green Plan.

In summary, we certainly understand the importance of having a complete, up-to-date, and publically available open space and farmland preservation registry. We agree that such a registry would be of great value to municipalities, state agencies and others interested in coordinating open space, farmland preservation and responsible growth goals. The Department remains committed to continuing our POSM project, but we must be practical given our current resource constraints. We will continue to work on the POSM project within our existing resources and we welcome the opportunity to work with the Environment Committee and proponents of the bill to better understand the type of information they are seeking to gather for the open space registry.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact the Department's legislative liaison, Robert LaFrance, at (860) 424-3401 or [Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov](mailto:Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov).